



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

End of Session Report: September 2025 - August 2026

Ordered by the Committee for the Economy to be published on 23 September 2026

Report: NIA XX/22-27 - Committee for the Economy

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Powers and Membership

Powers

1. The Committee for the Economy is a Statutory Departmental Committee established in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of Strand One of the Belfast Agreement and under Assembly Standing Order No 48. The Committee has a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Department for the Economy and has a role in the initiation of legislation.
2. The Committee has power to:
 - consider and advise on Departmental budgets and Annual Plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
 - approve relevant secondary legislation and take the Committee Stage of relevant primary legislation;
 - call for persons and papers;
 - initiate enquiries and make reports; and
 - consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by the Minister of the Economy.

Membership

3. The Committee has nine Members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of five Members. The membership of the Committee is as follows:

Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Diane Forsythe MLA¹ (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA²³⁴⁹
Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA
Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA
Mr David Honeyford MLA
Mr Declan Kearney MLA⁵⁶⁷
Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA
Ms Kate Nicholl MLA⁸

¹ On 26 February 2026 Ms Diane Forsythe replaced Mr Gary Middleton

² On 17 June 2024 Mr Doug Beattie MC replaced Mr Mike Nesbitt

³ On 9 September 2024 Mr Colin Crawford replaced Mr Doug Beattie MC

⁴ On 7 October 2024 Ms Diana Armstrong replaced Mr Colin Crawford

⁵ On 10 February 2025 Ms Emma Sheerin replaced Mr Phillip McGuigan

⁶ On 24 November 2025 Ms Jemma Dolan replaced Ms Emma Sheerin

⁷ On 2 March 2026 Mr Declan Kearney replaced Ms Jemma Dolan

⁸ On 9 September 2024 Ms Kate Nicholl replaced Ms Sorcha Eastwood MP

⁹ On 7 September 2026 Mr Mike Nesbitt replaced Ms Diana Armstrong

Summary: September 2025 – August 2026 Session

4. In the period until August 2026, the Economy Committee met 38 times (plus a further meeting in joint concurrent session with the Committee for Education) – 94% of proceedings were in public session. The Committee heard from 61 organisations and 224 witnesses. The Committee met outside of Parliament Buildings on 2 occasions (at Impact Training Ltd and TimberQuay, Ulster University).
5. At several strategic planning sessions, the Committee elected to undertake focused scrutiny, in different formats, to inform its understanding of the wide-ranging policy remit of the Department for the Economy, to prepare for a fulsome Departmental primary legislative programme.
6. As the Committee's extensive remit includes cross-cutting matters, the Committee undertook: a joint informal session with the Committee for Finance and Chartered Accountants Ireland on the devolution of corporation tax; a joint informal session with the Committee for the Executive Office and the House of Lords International Agreements Committee and held a joint concurrent meeting with the Committee for Education on the Skills Strategy and TransformEd.





Committee for the Economy and Committee for Finance Members with the Chartered Accountants Ireland.

7. During this period, the Committee undertook 6 external visits (including to: TimberQuay, the Utility Regulator, SONI, Seagate Technologies, Impact Training Ltd and the Balmoral Show) and held 5 informal meetings with stakeholders. Additionally, the Chairperson attended 8 informal meetings with stakeholders on behalf of the Committee.
8. The Committee undertook scrutiny of the Department's draft budget, noting that the budget had not been agreed and expressing concerns at proposed funding cuts within the contingency budget. The Committee received briefings from the Minister on 2 occasions.
9. Please see the following short films that the Committee commissioned to inform stakeholders of some of its engagement activities:

TimberQuay, Ulster University

SONI

Impact Training Ltd

Balmoral Show

10. The Committee ordered this report to be published on X September 2026.

Legislation: September 2025 – August 2026 Session

11. The Committee recognised that the mandate had been foreshortened to around 3 years and the Department was expected to undertake a full programme of primary legislation. This would require the completion of a large number of carefully considered Committee Stages.

12. The Committee completed the Committee Stage for two Executive Bills, the ***Insolvency (Amendment) Bill*** and the ***RHI (Closure of Non-Domestic Scheme) Bill***. The Committee received a limited number of responses to both calls for evidence and Members heard oral evidence from a total of 10 stakeholders. The Committee noted its thanks to the Department officials working on both Bills, for their dedication and thorough responses to Members questions. Both Bills have since received Royal Assent.
13. The Committee is currently undertaking the Committee Stage for the ***Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill*** and the ***Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill***. Both calls for evidence have now closed. The Committee will consider the responses and hear oral evidence from stakeholders in September.
14. In anticipation of Second Stage, and due to a large legislative programme, the Committee agreed to launch its call for evidence for the ***Renewable Electricity Generation Bill*** and a Private Members Bill, the ***Regional Balance Bill***, prior to summer recess.
15. The Committee anticipated that a further 3 Executive Bills were also expected to be undertaken in the remaining months of the 2022-27 mandate. The Committee noted that the Minister was sought to introduce the Employment Rights Bill. This Bill is expected to include a wide range of far-reaching changes which will require a thorough Committee Stage.
16. Videos promoting the calls for evidence for each Committee Stage can be found here:
 - ***Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill***
 - ***Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill***
 - ***Renewable Electricity Generation Bill***



Members at the Balmoral Show promoting its call for evidence, May 2026.

17. The Committee considered 19 statutory rules. 10 of these were considered using the new Delegated Legislation procedure. In particular, the Committee considered the Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay (Miscarriage) Regulations. The Committee agreed to promote its call for views for this proposed rule using a **video of the Chairperson**. The Committee received a small number of responses and agreed to support the regulations 25 February 2026.
18. Whilst the related primary legislation was awaiting Royal Assent, the Committee undertook its call for views of the RHI Scheme (Closure) Regulations and received one response. Members thanked the Departmental official working on RHI and noted Ofgem support was secured for a further quarter. This meant RHI payments would not be subject to interruption owing to the transition from the previous to the current legislation. The Committee agreed to support the regulations on 2 July 2026.
19. The Committee reported on one Legislative Consent Motion relating to Westminster legislation. The report can be found here: ***Report on Sustainable Aviation Fuel Bill***.

Scrutiny Areas: September 2025 – August 2026 Session

Skills

20. The Committee considered: measures to address the skills gap; support for apprenticeships; support for lifelong learning; widening participation; economic inactivity; and childcare - hearing from a range of stakeholders. Members noted the persistent skill shortages and economic inactivity levels across Northern Ireland, and welcomed the development of the Green Skills and Digital Action Plans.
21. The Committee held an external meeting at Impact Training NI and received briefing on Skills for Life and Work, as well as its Entry Level and Level 1 vocational courses.



Members receiving a tour of the facilities at Impact Training, Lanark Way.

22. Working with the Committee for Education, the Economy Committee met in joint concurrent session and considered cross-cutting issues, including the impact of TransformED NI on the Skills Strategy.

Higher Education

23. The Committee considered persistent funding issues and their associated impact in the Higher Education (HE) sector. This included options for changes to the treatment of the Maximum Student Number (MaSN) cap for Higher Education and the impact of changes to immigration rules on the viability of post-graduate provision in Northern Ireland.
24. The Committee noted with some frustration that the review of the HE funding model had not been completed. The probable reporting end-date for this key important review was now likely to be in the next mandate.
25. The Committee spent time understanding the challenges in respect of student mobility across the island of Ireland, hearing from the Irish Universities Association on how qualification equivalencies and timing of results are not the sole the challenge for student mobility.

Energy

22. The Committee elected to focus its consideration on energy issues relating to: interconnection and security of supply; network grid connections; smart metering; on-shore renewable electricity generation incentivisation; community energy and off-shore renewable development.
23. The Committee held an informal session with the Utility Regulator in respect of price controls, markets, consumer protection, compliance and enforcement, networks and energy futures. The Committee also received oral and written evidence from the Utility Regulator in respect of the Single Electricity Market and the potential of re-coupling the SEM with the GB electricity market.



Members meeting with the Utility Regulator

24. The Committee held an informal session with the System Operator in Northern Ireland (SONI), in respect of the operation of the Single Electricity Market and the work being undertaken to transition the grid to deliver more decarbonised electricity to consumers.



Members meeting with SONI.

25. The Committee heard evidence from Great British Energy (GBE), Community Energy NI (CENI) and the Department in respect of an Energy Saving Trust benchmarking exercise. The Committee also heard evidence on the development of a Community Energy Policy Framework, led by the Department, in parallel with the delivery of the GBE Local Power Plan.
26. Members expressed concerns in respect of the attainment of the Department's Energy Strategy targets by 2030 including the renewable electricity generation and low carbon economy growth targets. The Committee intends to hear an update from the Department on the 2026 Energy Strategy in Autumn 2026.

Windsor Framework

22. The Committee continued to consider relevant European Union matters. This included the impact of the loss of European Social Funding and key regulatory changes associated with the Windsor Framework. These related to changes to customs arrangements affecting the road haulage industry and further consideration of the Windsor Framework issues relating to new car registration, where these lay outside the remit of the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee.
23. In November 2025 the Committee heard evidence from The Rt Hon Lord Murphy of Torfaen in respect of his Independent Review of the Windsor Framework.



Members pictured with Lord Murphy in the Great Hall, Parliament Buildings.

Regional Balance

24. The Committee continued its consideration of policy interventions designed to address economic regional imbalances. This included the progress of the Local Economic Partnerships, the Clustering Strategy, Enhanced Investment Zones and of the City & Growth Deals, particularly the Ulster University Magee expansion.

25. In March 2026 the Committee received an update from the Magee Taskforce on its final report and action plan of the for the expansion of the Magee campus of Ulster University. The Committee also undertook a visit to Seagate Technologies.



Members meeting with the Magee Taskforce at TimberQuay, Ulster University, City of Derry

26. The Committee also received an update from Invest NI on the implementation of the Lyons Review, its review of investments and its regional balance targets. The Committee will hear further from Invest NI later in the mandate on exports and the Internationalisation Strategy.

Tourism

27. The Committee considered the views of the sector in respect of the economic impact of the potential business rates revaluation on the hospitality and tourism sector. Members noted the sector had previously argued that changes to the minimum wage, employers' National Insurance contributions and energy prices have increased costs whilst above inflation increases on food and alcohol have increased turnover and skewed business rates assessments.
28. The Committee reviewed the feedback to the Department's consultation on tourism inspection and categorisation. Members welcomed the focus on quality in tourist accommodation and felt the categorisation and inspection regime should support responsible providers to improve the hospitality offer in Northern Ireland. Members however expressed significant concerns that irresponsible providers may be obtaining Tourism NI categorisation whilst not complying with other restrictions such as planning or entertainment licenses.
26. Members welcomed the extension of the Fáilte Ireland marketing brand – Hidden Heartlands - to Northern Ireland.
27. The Committee also reviewed the Department's consultation on aviation policy and will receive evidence on the feedback to the consultation in due course.

Annex A**Committee for the Economy****Expenditure for the period 1 September 2025 – 31 August 2026**

Budget area	Details	Expenditure
Committee Travel - committee members and staff travel and subsistence in relation to visits and meetings outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of travel for 2 meetings held outside Parliament Buildings and the Chairperson's attendance at Farnborough Airshow.	£2144.25
Advertising – the cost of public notices relating to committee inquiries, the committee stage of Bills and meetings held outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of public notices in relation to: • Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill • Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill • Regional Balance Bill • Renewable Electricity Generation Bill	£4508.00
Specialist Advice - the cost of specialist advisers appointed by the committee and commissioned research, also the cost of drafting Standing Orders	Specialist adviser to the Committee on [issue/inquiry to which the advice related]	N/A
Refreshments & Hospitality	Includes the cost of all refreshments and hospitality provided by the committee; including informal meetings and working lunches.	£3286.88
General expenses	Includes the cost of seminars (excluding refreshments and hospitality); room hire; witness expenses; gifts provided by the committee during visits; and conference fees for members.	N/A
Total Expenditure		£9939.13